

May 2013 extended essay reports

WORLD STUDIES

Overall grade boundaries

Grade:	A	B	C	D	E
Mark range:	29-36	23-28	16 - 22	8-15	0-7

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The range of work submitted was considerable, though relatively few EEs made use of disciplines from different Diploma groups, with most falling within Group 3, Individuals and Societies. Essays which combine apparently disparate disciplines seem to have a greater coherence and natural advantage over those based on disciplines which are closely related. However, in the case of the best EEs, some heartening and inspiring work was done on topics of vital contemporary significance.

A small number of EEs were based in one discipline only and appear to have been submitted as WSEEs because they did not fit elsewhere. This is to be discouraged. The approach to an interdisciplinary WSEE is different to that of a single discipline EE.

Some WSEEs, particularly from schools in the US, took the form of a report rather than a research essay. Often based on a narrow range of internet-only news media, these EEs did not tend to follow the IB style expected of an Extended Essay and contained little or no conceptual or theoretical background in any Diploma discipline. They appeared to be adapted work from another examining system, or written without the EE guidelines in mind. This was a shame, as it proved difficult given the specific nature of the criteria to reward the enthusiasm and hard work which had gone into them.

A number of EEs cited School Based Syllabus subjects such as Peace and Conflict Studies or Human Rights as underlying disciplines but there was no evidence that the candidates had looked at the guides for those subjects. Whatever the outcome, candidates who based their EEs on subjects which they were actually studying tended to fare better, as with most EE subjects. IB co-ordinators and supervisors could help a great deal in this matter with regards to advising.

As above, the connections with particular disciplines were sometimes tenuous. An example is citing Mathematics when there are no more than a few calculations in the Essay.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: research question

The RQ does not have to be a question but it is important to convey the nature of the issue of global importance and the local manifestation. Slick proverb- or idiom-like titles are best avoided. There should not be significant differences between the RQ on the cover sheet, first page and in the introduction. Overambitious RQs are to be avoided: this is a 4,000 word, 40 hour task.

Criterion B: introduction

The introduction needs to include the research question, context, significance and worthiness of the topic. It should articulate the global issue (not briefly), its local manifestation and rationale. This mechanical process allows a good supervisor to steer the candidate towards full marks. Unreferenced, single paragraph introductions are likely to score zero. This is the place to establish the issue of global significance, over several pages including key concepts.

Criterion C: investigation

Mostly, investigation used an adequate range of appropriate sources. Some report-style EEs were narrowly based on current published news internet sources, relying on paraphrase/narrative, lacking an academic, investigative approach. The best included theory, generation of own data, discussion of methods, reliability and presentation of different perspectives. This is not to say that all WSEEs should incorporate own data generated through experiment, questionnaires, sampling, interviews etc, but such EEs seem to produce more coherent arguments to link the global and local and the different disciplines.

Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Candidates often did not place understanding in an academic context, the current state of play in the fields of study under investigation. The weaker essays stayed within the confines of the local manifestation, with no broader discipline-related context, achieving Level 1 for this criterion.

Criterion E: reasoned argument

There were some science-based EEs which took a hypothesis-evidence-proof approach. Generally it was easy to follow the thread of argument. Weaker EEs included large and unsubstantiated generalizations which lacked supporting evidence. The best approach was to structure the essay in paragraphs each of which contained internally consistent claims and evidence contributing to an overall argument.

Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills appropriate to the subject

This criterion requires maturity of judgment and confidence in the underlying disciplines. Evaluation of sources was rarely seen. Because the WSEE allows candidates to engage with issues that are beyond the normal content of academic disciplines and about which they are passionate, it is all the harder to import and apply analytical and evaluative skills. Where done successfully the results were outstanding.

Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject

There was difficulty integrating the subject language of different disciplines. Often the vocabulary of different disciplines was visible, but few candidates could use it to say how, for example, a term used in one might have application in another.

Criterion H: conclusion

Surprisingly, many candidates did not refer back to the RQ in the conclusion, or demonstrate global consciousness. This is the opportunity to do more than summarize what has gone before, to take a step back and consider the broader perspective and to think of where the research might lead next. A few candidates introduced new material in the conclusion, which is not acceptable.

Criterion I: formal presentation

Much can be improved in reference and citation. Citation is vital wherever the work of others is included, in a consistent manner. Some contents pages were unhelpful, referring only to introduction, main body and conclusion. Some report-style EEs lacked paragraphs and even page numbers.

Criterion J: abstract

Some abstract marks were lost through poor supervision, where candidates wrote a preamble ignoring the required research question, scope and conclusion.

Criterion K: holistic judgment

High and admirable levels of engagement allowed some candidates to convey personal motivation and commitment. Few WSEEs convey a sense of a routine task to be accomplished as part of the Diploma.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

A number of EEs are clearly written without an understanding of or consideration for the criteria. Supervisors are encouraged to make candidates familiar with the criteria and give students a checklist before submission. Examiners want to give marks, not deduct them, and six marks are there for the taking on criteria A, B and J. It is frustrating to be unable to award marks for the research question, abstract and introduction. Candidates must identify the disciplines on which the Essay is based on the front page of the yellow cover sheet, and on the cover sheet of the Essay.

Candidates and supervisors are reminded that the disciplines must be IB-offered subjects. This means that Law and Education, for example are not acceptable as disciplines.

Candidates are recommended to make clear the issue of global importance and local manifestation in the abstract, introduction and even research question. The time to expand the global issue is in the introduction, and it should be revisited in the conclusion. Introductions of a few lines or a single paragraph rarely do justice to the topic: the best introductions are several pages long.

Candidates should be encouraged to engage in original research. Nearly all of the best EEs involved case studies, interviews, surveys or experiments. This is not to imply that top quality EEs based entirely on secondary sources are impossible. However the report-style EE based on a few internet sources rarely did well.

Writing a WSEE is a complex task. Supervisors should, in their first contact with a candidate, ask whether the proposal contains an issue of global importance with a local manifestation, which is capable of being researched using the conceptual framework and methodology of two IB Diploma disciplines. This is absolutely essential to the writing of a successful WSEE. Supervisors should ask the candidate to give details of the subject specific vocabulary, terminology and concepts from each discipline. If this is achieved there is greater likelihood of success with the four-mark criteria.

Further comments

A weakness of many WSEEs submitted is that candidates do not make use of the conceptual framework, theory and vocabulary of the disciplines claimed by incorporating them in the EE. A simple way to help with this is for the supervisor to use the OCC and to offer the candidate sight of the early pages of the subject guide on the OCC. In Geography for example a glossary of important terms is available at the front of the guide. It is simply not good enough omit all reference to the disciplines, or to identify them by name only on the cover sheet.

The very best essays launched the RQ like throwing the ball aloft in a tennis serve, then addressed it firmly and kept an eye on it during what followed.